

# Mr. Mirror

Phillips Academy's Arts and Literature Magazine Fall 1990 / Winter 1991



# the MIRROR

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# *The Mirror*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Antonia Tellis	
pencil drawing	5
Diana E. Zipeto	
Pour Moi	6
Kathryn A. Henderson	
photo	9
Charlie Glass	
Motor Oil America	10
Suburban	12
Self-titled	13
Josh Russo	
The Land of Inside Jokes	14
Casey Greenfield	
What She Said	15
Damp Haze	19
Daphne Matalene	
The Geriatrics' Nite Out	20
Rebecca Howland	
First Step	22
Susie Reiss	
oil painting	23
Rebecca Howland	
Fire	24
Donna Palma Coppola	
"Electricity" photo	25
Nat Furman	
Me.	26
Shanti Roundtree	
photo	27
Nat Furman	
The 11th Man of Bishop South	28
Puru Das	
sculpture	29
Nat Furman	
Princeton in the Fall	30
Anna Kim	
Acquainted with the Night	31
Stephanie Mudge	
charcoal drawing	33
Kate Stephenson	
Grown-Up Fibs	34
Jesse Wennik	
photo	35
Kate Stephenson	
Williamsburg	36
Jessika Miner	
Strategy to Sink or Swim	38
Jason Haas	
photo	39
Jessika Miner	
Juju	40

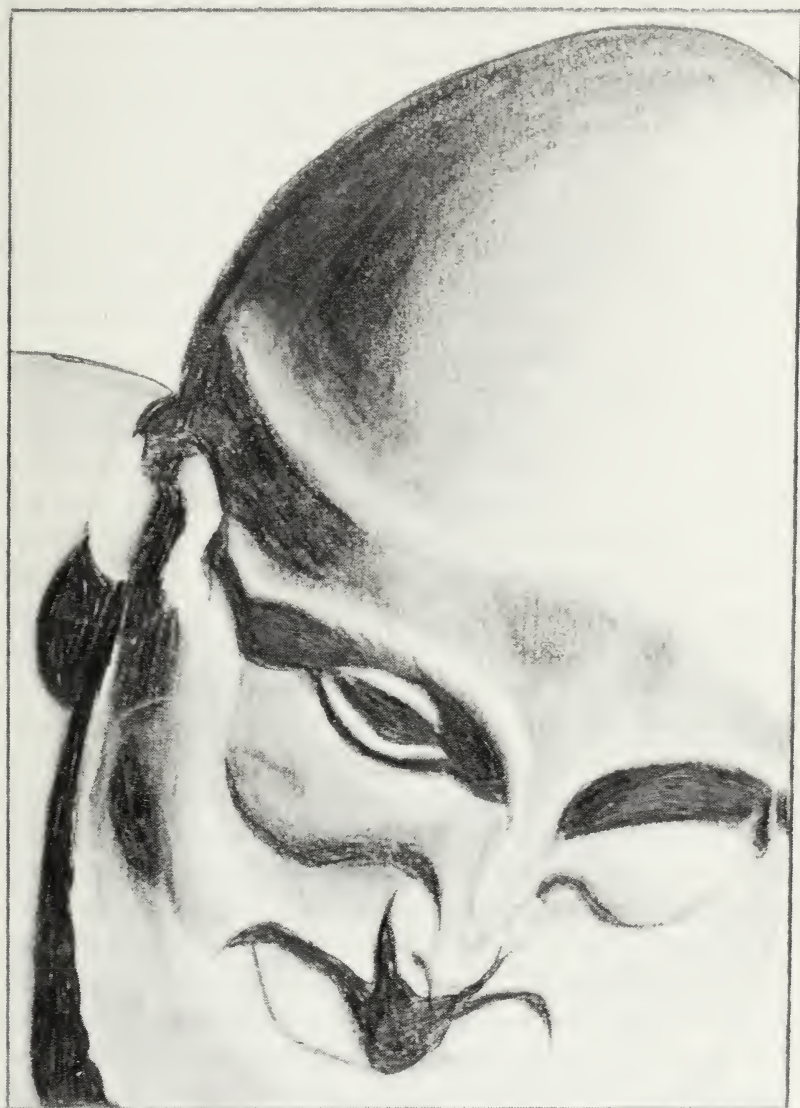
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Stephen Lee	
The Diner	42
Donna Palma Coppola	
"Sand" photo	43
Max Ullrich	
photo	47
Sasha Kipka	
Autumn	48
Jesse Wennik	
photo	49
Sasha Kipka	
Bait	50
Liz Chen	
Pinta	52
Shanti Roundtree	
photo	53
Cami	
Son (Sun) ceasing	54
Anna Kim	
flower print	55
Jenny Elkus	
pencil drawing	57
Matthew Twist	
Existential Compendium	58
Kiki Chiungos	
Reunion	62
Hazel Boyd	
ink print	63
Kiki Chiungos	
Airwalk	64
Max Ullrich	
ceramic	65
Mike Blanton	
Dinner	66
Holly Parker	
Once Upon a Wall	68
Senia Maymin	
Joe's Change	70
Ascha Drake	
oil painting	73
Kinn-Ming Chan	
For the N.E.A.	74
Mike Pieretti	
photo	75
Kinn-Ming Chan	
White Flowers	76
Jason Haas	
photo	78



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pencil drawing by Antonia Tellis



## Pour Moi

by Diana Zipeto

No more bubble stuff. Sigh. I stood in front of the built-in cabinet across from the bathroom. I guessed I'd have to take a bath without bubbles. Bubbles were annoying anyway - kind of slimy and residue-y. But they were always promoted as wonderful, soothing - Bater had a Mr. Bubble t-shirt on the day of our English 515 final. "Mr. bubble! I want to take a bubble bath!" jumped from my mouth and memory. Bater smiled and enthusiastically gushed, "Isn't Mr. Bubble the best? I wear this t-shirt to all of my finals, it's getting a little rancid now..." Sorry, Bater, I'd turned off, planning my own bubble bath - my first in a bejillion years. Soon...during Christmas break. Yes. I would.

I can't describe what I see Mr. Bubble as - I guess he's just a happy cartoon bubble. But his essence is slapped across my memory - visions of his upside down face slapped across baby blue containers: pouring happiness out of the bottle and into the bath, out of my mom into me. Wiggling in the tub - letting Her turn off the water when it was high enough; having my hair washed, hearing it swirl by my ears in the private, complete solitude that is underwater listening.

Turn the water on. I walked between the bathroom and my bedroom with no clothes on as the water filled and filled - how high do I let it get? I grabbed the slim volume I'd been reading: yes, Bater had said it was nice to read as you bathed. I stepped in the tub - should I wait until the water finished? - I stretched out. My how I'd grown. No longer fitting in the length, almost forced to sit up. Visions of Alice after eating a teacake. I'm glad there were no bubbles. My body. I hadn't seen it in such a loving environment in (insert quantity of time). Maybe it was never.

Forcing myself, I turn the water off. Was there enough water to keep me warm? To get me clean? If I scrunched my knees, I could lie like I used to. My hair, although cropped to my chin, still squeaked out a swish and I was alone. Returning to my labor of love, I passed the soap over my stomach. Was it flat?

No more butter. Sigh. I stood in front of the enemy refrigerator across from the downstairs bathroom. I guessed I'd have to have bread without butter. Butter was greasy and fattening anyway. I'd eaten the last of it myself only hours before, dipping bread into melted pat, slap, hit of it. Forcing myself, I turned away



from the refrigerator and felt the old butter in me go rancid.

My stomach responded to my soapy love with a gurgle. Was I hungry? The bruises that colored the abdomen (my abdomen) were blurred by three inches of moving water. I moved the hair away from my ear. Maybe the soothing swish of the water could find its way into me - I had enough exposed openings, didn't I? I ran the soap over my breasts, imagined them held, wondering why I was so vulnerable. My legs, thighs - they were getting stronger each day that I ran. What an interesting shape a leg, my leg, is. I noticed I had started to judge, my head started to ache slightly. I stopped judging and washing for the moment and moved on. I would return.

Would there have been enough butter anyway?

No heat. Driving back from the pediatrician, my pediatrician, my feet were plastered to the heater in the car. My mom gagged at the intensity of the heat that barely warmed me. "Diana, why aren't you wearing your winter coat?" I was wearing the ochre barn jacket from J Crew that was an XS and that I had just bought. "But I love this jacket," I whined half jokingly - I could not wear it enough. "Well, you'll have it for the rest of your life... wear your winter coat now so you don't freeze." "Can we at least get it cleaned?" I thought of washing away the old smell of cigarettes as well as the coat's no-longer-comforting oversized-ness. I wonder if it will be warm enough?

I sat up in the tub to wash my hair. This was the part I usually hated. I had to put my head under the faucet so Mom could rinse the bubbles out of my hair. I lay back in the tub, suds still in my hair, and let my hair free itself of shampoo. I curled onto my side. I fit the tub perfectly in fetal form; knees and feet, tailbone and head pushed to the sides, half in the water... half cold.

"God, I'm soooo cold!" I burrowed into the warmth of my jacket and into the warmth of friendship and replaced the receiver on its cradle. Nat slid down the brick wall next to the pay phone and scrunched his knees to his chest. "You seem to be in the fetal position," I toyed with the image of nights we had spent curled into each other; not sleeping, simply resting, resting simply, so secure - was it enough? "Fetal attraction," Nat returned my comment and sent me fetalling in laughter. He had just convinced me not to ask my dad for a ride home from the train station - completely ridiculous seeing as we both had purple hands and weary bodies, and a desire to not be where we were. But during the conversation

with my dad, Nat had feverishly whispered in my ears - an annoying gnat - "No let's walk, let's walk, please let's walk!" We walked towards my house - a bejillion miles away - and held purple hands. "Sometimes holding hands just isn't satisfying," I blurted. It was Sunday, we each had our separate school the next day, Nat had to go back to Cambridge in a few hours.

Reach for the conditioner. My short hair needed only a little, but I didn't know how much was enough. My hair had been long, so long, just days ago. By Senior year at my school, everyone's hair is headed straight down their backs. I had mine cut, shaved at the nape - much to the distress of my mom, the disbelief of my friends. I had wanted it short for so long - I loved it now. (Consequently, mom and friends love it, too.) It could not ever have gotten long enough anyway. My hair softened with the conditioner's magical ingredients - does anyone really know what makes conditioner work? - and I opened the drain with a waterlogged toe. The luxury of the bath, the cleansing-but-now tainted-and-cool water had been enough. For now. I let the water drain around me and stood up already dry. I reached for the towel anyway, not ready to fully trust.



photo by Kathy A. Henderson

## Motor Oil America

by Charlie Glass

He comes with the world's  
cord of wood strapped to his shoulders.  
I know: I've watched him  
ambling by, wailing mystically  
through his obsidian spheres.  
They radiate pleasures  
of a veteran's lifetime, digging for gold  
in all the wrong places.

His hands are big enough  
to pull the balls from their sockets.  
They don't twitch or flutter;  
they thud, a flag in one and a shovel  
in the other. They grow on the wood  
to keep spilling into his pockets.

I can't bear his tobacco smile.  
It's like a million good intentions  
turned against you. The trees  
and his chainsaw will tell you:  
all the pain for a half-empty  
cup of coffee and eight frost-bitten toes.

He's never seen polished leather,  
unless those glaring black jump boots  
shone for a minute as he stepped off the plane,  
the jungle rot already setting in.  
Eating into his feet, coursing through  
blue and red tracks to the heart,  
to his brain. He'll never  
sit with me, he'll never know  
anything better than a cold longneck,  
a fresh quart of motor oil.

## Suburban

by Charlie Glass

A wooded campsite sits smugly on the fringe of memory.  
Three guns and a full stringer gave that nylon palace  
the majesty of a barren birch, a living spark  
piercing the swift gray ceiling, puncturing  
a way for your ego to rush out and embrace  
the still, green pines, the transparent underbrush  
coming from three-hundred-sixty degrees  
to pay homage to your thorn-proof jacket.

Rubber soles crunching exhaust-black ice.  
Your four-wheel drive only makes tracks  
to the brackish street swamp that slogs along rigid lamps  
and the branches to the right or left, up to dim Christmas lights  
over sometimes golden windows that throw crusty patches  
but can't break the rhythm. There are no diagonals  
or curves in the solid plaid, and the only thick stripes  
run straight to the smoky skyscrapers  
or straight to the squash courts. Your tennis shoes  
make that ski-pant scrape in inch-deep snow  
but there are a million confused footprints  
plodding across the lawn.

Those chimneys don't spew the same stuff  
that streaked past bony tree-fingers into the blue deepness  
where you wanted to let go and tumble to the stars.  
Frozen muck doesn't cling to your boots and the happy sting  
of a branch raked across your wind-numbed face has dulled  
into the pain of your fingers curled in a pocket. The ground  
is dead, and eyes that receive less through the windshield  
than they shut out have never known the joy  
of a crackling brown-orange mat of leaves kicked over,  
the fine earth below thrust under frostbitten fingernails.



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## Self-titled

by Charlie Glass

I am not writing this from an earthy field  
with grasshoppers ricocheting off the back of my head  
and a little green apple holding down the pages  
flapping in manure wind.

My elbows aren't stuck to the varnish of a never-ending  
oak table, lost eyes stroking the rows of wormy volumes  
like cell bars that offer subtle glimpses of what seem to be  
truths and shady lawns.

My window doesn't shine with iridescent beach-balls  
or the flash of rockets, and the screened opening underneath  
doesn't let in smoke or nerve gas,  
or even a pleasant mist.

I can't get answers out of the abused walls.  
I can't reach into my desk and pull out clumps of seaweed  
or a handful of slippery offal, dime-store revelations  
rising to my nostrils.

I am wrapped in a tight white sheet, reaching awkwardly  
for those two narrow eye-holes that give me air  
and an occasional vision.

I am shrouded in a loose shirt that conceals a set of young imaginings,  
unused but eager in some lightless chamber.

But what of shotguns, the dead birds, the cicada buzz,  
the blistered feet, the leaky beer cans, the rattling car window  
against my cheek? What of broken leather shoestrings,  
petoskey stones and friendships found and lost?  
Is this the sum of my being?  
I don't want to be a cliché, yet.



## Land of Inside Jokes

by Josh Russo

Remember when you got caught  
In front of the curtain  
When it closed on opening night,  
And the crowd laughed,  
And you liked it so much that you did it again  
The next night.

Remember the shining, soft copper hair  
Of the frowning girl with the quiet donkey laugh,  
And always trying to be behind her  
In the congo line  
For an excuse to hold her small waist.

And Ricky watching you watching her  
Who had an idea similar to yours,  
But who kept his hands in his pockets too long.

Remember the stunt.  
Jumping up, lying prone in the air  
And gathering momentum on the way down.  
Hitting the ground  
The crowd divided, half laughing, half in mid-gasp.

Remember every opening night  
Remember joking away butterflies  
With kids who knew the inside jokes.  
And the indoor sun  
All at once turning nine hundred and fifty minds  
And one thousand nine hundred eyes  
Into one giant silhouette.

---

## What She Said

by Casey Greenfield

I felt like a speedbump on the highway of love, a lab rat in the solitary life of existing, divorced, in a New England valley. I walked up the twisting road that led to the one-story house that wasn't mine, my boots like castinets on the icy pavement. The oversized black mailbox was cavernous and hollow, empty as it was every day.

The house and everything in it felt temporary, random in the worst sense. The bed had been in the same spot for so long that I knew it would never move, but it was no longer a part of the room, of my life, as it once had been; it was just an accidental piece of furniture. The unmarked papers that I tossed down onto my desk, next to the tattered thesaurus and rhyming dictionary, would have to wait until well after the hum of daylight subsided and the cat had found her way home for the night.

My daughter brought her plate and mine into the kitchen and while she made sounds with the faucet I rubbed my eyes, the sun sinking lower across the field. She called something out to me and I answered, my eyes still closed against the glare and the knowledge that the bird feeder had probably fallen to the ground again. My body, though too thin for these clothes, was defeatedly a victim of gravity; my feet were pulled to the ground even as I lifted them to walk. I licked my lips and looked around vaguely, past the newspapers piled up on my windowsill at Randy's dog running by outside.

When she was here we had been tight, round, sealed, somehow gaining momentum even as we lost ourselves. We would sit up in bed after Kara had fallen asleep and talk or not talk, just to be with each other and marvel at the proximity of her fingers to mine, the hair that I could reach out to stroke. Sometimes she would lean back, her neck stretching out and opening to me. And I would give and she would receive and I would lie with my head on the pillow and one arm across her body, the other against her back. We would lie like that, breathing and listening to crickets in summer or the crack of twigs under a dog's foot in winter. We separated not with a break but like caramel, pulling apart slowly until one day two pieces existed where only one was before, and the bedroom became a place where we sought silent sanctuary, our bodies touching politely if at all.

Things were rearranged, and the gaps left by what she took were soon filled by the dust and books that accumulated as months went by. The piped-in heat was still there but the bed was bigger, flatter now, and when Kara was behind the barrier of her bedroom door there remained nothing to do but read and be alone.

The cat's ears were drawn back and his eyes were fixed at a point in the black square defined by the window. Something rustled outside, probably a townie from the next county who figured that on this street we wouldn't think to lock our doors. He came closer and I saw Kara's door tightly shut (please, Kara, don't come out ). My hand temporarily froze on my heel as I stopped pulling off my boot, but a moment later I stood up and leaned into the space of the window. "What do you want ?" I whispered loudly.

Behind me she opened the front door and stepped inside as if she hadn't walked out one day eighteen months before. Her face was red from the cold outside and her hands looked chapped. I looked at her and bit my lip harder than I meant to, tasted blood, and felt tears in the bottom wells of my eyes but I blinked them away. I turned to watch her as she crossed the hall into the kitchen, stood in the light of the refrigerator, and drank from the carton of 2% milk. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and looked at me, the table and stove between us. She looked the same, I realized as my hands found change in my pockets, and she walked past me and into our room. I followed her and closed the door, took her head in my hands. Cupping her skull I pressed my lips to her forehead, and drew my breath in with a gasp as her outdoor hands ducked inside my shirt and up my back. We stood for a minute or ten, my eyes closed and her chest pressed up through her coat against my body. I pulled away from her and she looked at me, taking her coat off and started to lay it down on the bed. It was heavy and hers as I handed it back and placed my hand on her shoulder to guide her out of the room. She looked at my mouth and then up at my eyes, shrugged her shoulders and walked out. "Bye," she said without turning around as the door slammed. The refrigerator continued its low hum that seemed to exist only at night and I picked at the hangnail on my thumb. The silence was there and loud but not real; I felt that the way I woke up if someone watched me sleep. I pushed my heel back into my boot and stepped out onto the stones.

She was sitting on the lawn, her knees up to her chest and her hair tucked be-

hind an ear. I watched her not turn to me for a minute and then I sat down next to her. I could see the steam her breath made in the frigid night, a natural answer to the nicotine-laced puffs she had blown with me in the coffeehouse when we were in college together.

"The cat is still here," I said.

"Could I stay with you," She stared straight ahead, "for a while?" Her eyes were shining with cold and water.

She needed to get away from there for awhile, she told me. She needed her space, she needed time, I could understand that, couldn't I? He was working at home now, so things had gotten tense in the past few weeks. Sometimes people needed to be apart.

"Why here?" I looked at her as I spoke.

I heard her swallow. The field was a basin of midnight clouds in front of us, something to watch while I sat with my hand an inch from her body.

"You always ask," her voice was gravelly but even.

"Ask?"

"You never just say anything or do anything. You always have to ask. 'Why here?' 'Would you like mushrooms on yours?' 'Should we go to Grand Teton with Kara?'"

Numb from the water on the ground, my hands thawed momentarily as I blew warm air into them and rubbed them together, making a sandpaper noise in the windless night. Again I leaned back on my palms, the wetness hitting them fresh. "I should," I stopped to breathe, "have been a tyrant in my home. 'Cook my dinner.' 'I'm going down to Tweed's for a drink.' 'Bathe the baby.' I don't get it." I shook my head back and forth. "Is that what I should have done? I'm sorry, that was a question."

"No. And you don't have to snap at me." She sounded young and tired. "I just get sick of your, your...apathy. Not even firm apathy. Where is your...where are your convictions?" For the first time she looked at me. "Don't you ever want anything..." Her voice trailed off before she could even raise it the few notes to make a question.

"My mind," I said to her slowly, my cheeks now dry under the day's beard, "is not a...a...crystal ball. If you married me to have someone around who would give you orders, I'm sorry. I am truly sorry. If asking what you wanted was the

worst thing I ever did to you..."

A cloud moved slowly past the field as a sudden lazy wind woke the branches of the trees around us, and the moon's glow cast new shadows beyond our legs. I looked up to see the white ball dangling in the fog of the winter pre-dawn.

"Goodbye," I said to her as I stood up and brushed of the back of my jeans, to which pebbles and grass had attached themselves. Her head turned slightly but she still sat curled around herself, watching the moon and not asking me for a pair of gloves.

The front room was warm and small and as I closed the door behind me I saw the yellow light of the refrigerator, its door open just a few inches. I reached inside to close the mouth of the milk carton, and the door sealed itself shut with a dull, brief sucking noise. I sat down on my bed and unbuttoned my shirt as my body shivered in the renewed warmth. Once off my foot, the boot was heavy in my hand and the leather, I felt, was starting to crack from the cold.



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## Damp Haze

by Casey Greenfield

Tendrils scoop away the smooth line of your neck  
under the haze of moon and a solitary 'please,'  
parting lips, sounds of swallowing milk. Wet,  
a hand reaches over, speaks to the backs of my knees.  
Rustling cotton, green blades flattening,  
as I shift and roll, my shirt drinking in the water.  
Your arms are the safety bar on Loops of Lightning;  
my sock, a cold damp snake, waits and the world is hotter.

Quick clouds of steam, gray in the ink space  
float away, apart, erase as suddenly as they appear.  
I wrap around the straight line of your body, set a pace,  
move to the left. Tendons stretch and the stars in the black are newly clear.

Sun in my eyes, ponderous jeans, coffee and the cat one morning older,  
your sleeping hair and the reddening teeth marks on my shoulder.

## A Geriatrics' Nite Out

by Daphne Matalene

"WHAT? I DIDN'T HEAR," she screams at her husband across the table. It is a big table in a noisy restaurant, and she is mostly deaf anyway. He fills her in on the conversation she has missed, and she announces that it reminds her of a wonderful story... the same one she just missed out on. She tells it again, anyway. My mother and I roll our eyes; I want to put my face in my plate and cry.

It is the annual Grandmother Appeasement Dinner. It takes about thirty phone calls to arrange, but we are going out to dinner with Grandma's friends because they entertained us so nicely last summer. I have been dreading it ever since the first ring of the telephone - three deaf, blind octogenarians telling stories about World War II and complaining about the troubles they're having with The Help.

It makes me want to kill myself - not just because it's tedious and gives me a headache, but because it gives me nightmares. What if I get liver spots? What will I do when I can't see that my clothes are dirty? How does it feel to bury husbands and children? Worst of all, will my grandchildren feel this way about me? I steel myself in the shower while I put on my demure flowered dress and matching pink lipstick.

We walk into the restaurant and the crises begin. First up: who sits next to whom? Who sits under the air conditioner? Who has to sit with their back to the view? I roll my eyes at the extremely attractive waiter and mechanically sit down with my back to the window, and the air conditioner above my head. Crisis #2: Won't I be cold in that thin dress? Oh, what a shame - I'll miss the view. I smile sweetly, gritting my teeth. I've seen the view. I'm FINE. My mother and I kick each other under the table.

The waiter yells about the specials three times, my mother and I clarify them six times, and several geological ages after entering the restaurant, we have ordered. When he brings my salad, the waiter whispers, "Jeesus!", I grin wickedly and nod. He's very cute.

Now it's time to begin The Gripes. Before I became a widow... My cleaning woman... Those damned Greeks down the road... The portions here are so big... I have tuned out entirely, and am awakened when my pasta comes.



Now it's time to have fun with Dad and the busboy - a big game of "see-food." I have fettucine, which is rather uninteresting, but my dad has sweet-breads which look gross to begin with. Chewed up, they achieve levels of nastiness I can only dream of. The busboy tries not to spill his pitcher of water.

I tune in for a moment, and chuckle politely at the same racist joke I hear at every one of these affairs - something about a black person and a Jewish person at the Pearly Gates. They are so old and so hard of hearing that it's easier to pretend the joke is funny.

Interrogations begin now: what year are you in school? I've dropped out and I'm planning on opening a tattoo parlor. I bet you have a lot of handsome beaux, don't you? Yes. I have three children, too. Do you like school? No, I hate it because I can't find anyone at Andover who likes chains and whips as much as I do. And now I get the signal to switch off again: You'd just love our grandson... Yeah, right.

It seems like several eternities, but eventually it's 9:30, and time to go home to bed. I thank the geriatrics, and receive wet kisses from them. I have been wearing heels and my feet are killing me. My head is throbbing, and my face is twitching because I have been smiling for the past two hours. Finally, I am home in bed, laughing maniacally at the morbid meal I have just endured. Roger Daltrey was right - "I hope I die before I get old."

First Step

by Rebecca Howland

A smile for a song,  
lumbering gait to  
grace, the veil,  
opaque in its detachment,  
is flung off  
revealing eyes that see,  
thoughts that move.  
The voice,  
ignorant of utterance,  
brittle with misuse,  
is the most backward child  
stumbling with determination,  
her autonomy captured  
by the whirr of a camera.  
Yet there is no parental gloat  
of coffee table snapshots.  
Her first song is known  
only by my smile.

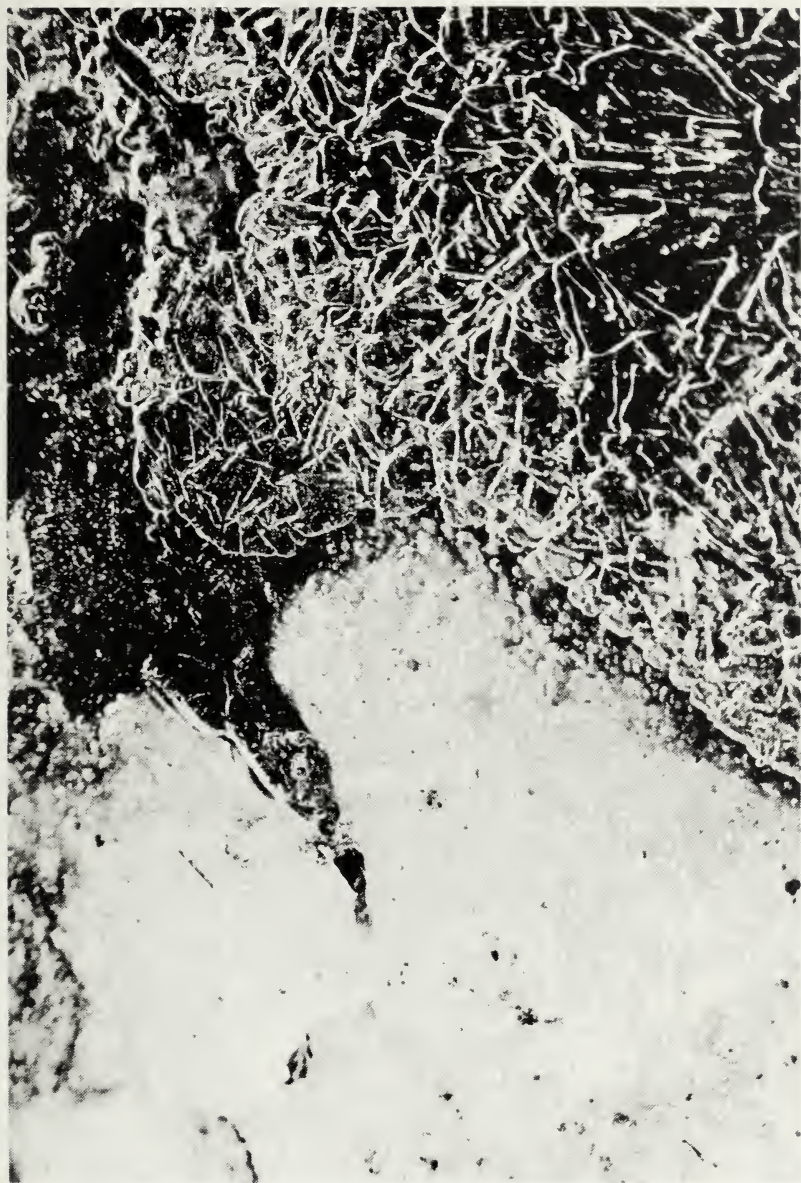


oil painting by Susie Reiss

## Fire

by Rebecca Howland

He didn't mean for it to get so out of hand. It was more of an experiment than anything else. An experiment of expression, and reaction, anthropologically ideal. He certainly didn't intend the centuries of wars, savage brutal wars, with countries clawing at each other, pitting life against life, faith against faith. He didn't want people to be drowned, or burned, or crushed between two rocks as easily as one squeezes a grape. All he had done was written a book. It was just a simple book, a book of stories, myths, fantasies. He didn't mean for it to get so out of hand. Before he could blink an eye, people were converting or killing, destroying whole cultures with one sweep of a fanatical, righteous hand. Words like heathen, savage, pagan justified the carnage, words based on a false premise. He didn't want the weight of responsibility, he didn't mean for it to get so out of hand. He picked up the book, felt the leather coarse and hard against his sweating palm. The pages were fragile tissues, with words etching out the meaning of man, woman, child. He didn't mean for it to get so out of hand, so he lit the first match, saw and felt the flames devour their prey, until nothing remained but for the stench of burning leather dissipating in the air. He didn't mean for it to get so out of hand, so he lit the second match, the pile of books rising high in a mountain of faith, crowned by a halo of orange flame. In the beginning there was light, but in the end there was fire.



"Electricity" photo by Donna Palma Coppola

Me.

by Nat Furman

My temperament is Todd Garman's nose exploded on my kitchen floor the day after I watch the Fourth of July Parade, my sister riding piggy-back.

I can make my class erupt with laughter and I can send my friend running to her room, crying because I wanted to make someone laugh.

I am the the nerd in the library and I am the bottom of Mr. Larcom's bell-shaped curve.

Sometimes I am compared to Elvis in his later years, to others I am big-boned and muscular, perhaps a few pounds overweight.

I am the leader and the model student. I am the fifteenth one to get the new gel shoes with neon stripes.

I am the guy who gets to walk around with a lot of hot girls and the big, slimy oaf that no one will dance with.

They try to pin me down but they never will.

I don't want to be someone else.

I'm more than just the big kid in the back row with something to say.





photo by Shanti Roundtree



## The 11th Man of Bishop South

by Nat Furman

Often they fill me with water and empty me on to the boy in the shower,  
but those are not my feelings.

On other occasions they throw me down the stairs in hopes I will knock  
the unsuspecting nerd into the wall with a thud.

Once I had a boy inside me.

He was short and ugly and he was stuck head first.

His tears stung me and then the big kid pulled him out.

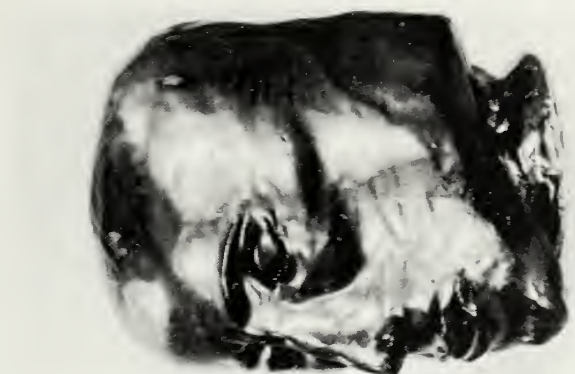
One too many times they have slam dunked into me, I am beginning to  
crack at the top.

I don't like it when I get lined with plastic because I know more than the  
big kid and little boy.

It is nice to know the tobacco spit and the cardboard and the letters  
from Mt. Ida College.

When it is time for the boys to leave I am the last one they see, I am  
brusquely greeted with their memories until they are passed along.

It is only the nerd and the little boys that I look forward to.



sculpture by Puru Das

## Princeton in the Fall

by Nat Furman

Flannel blankets strewn over the tailgates of gargantuan station wagons that are navy and fake wood.

Harris Tweed and the smell of scalding hot apple cider with cinnamon, kept in glass-lined thermoses next to scotch.

All the young kids are told to "play somewhere."

Parents reminisce about the days before there were bills for prep schools and skin doctors.

In the distance the band marches down Prospect Street, clad in orange and black that adorns me as well.

Behind the Colonial Club I tried my first cigarette.

In the pile of raked leaves I tried the strong brown liquid, for the first time I saw the great grassy world from both sides.

Soon after I threw up as my mother bitched and my dad beamed.

I kissed one of the best-liked girls under the blanket in the back when the Tigers lost.

My dad had too much to drink.

"TIGER, Tiger, sis, boom, ba!" as I fall asleep.

---

## Acquainted With the Night

by Anna Kim

Pulsating on the ground, falling, bouncing, falling down to die to give others life, each droplet of rain drenched Giovanni's body. Giovanni walked along the city streets, watching the rain, crashing white under the streams of light, hitting the cement, wet and vulnerable. Both mind and soul tucked in his pockets, he watched a man patrolling the city streets, up and down, observing his surroundings, looking at the other signs of life, just as he was, wishing that they were his own. He hoped his thoughts would clear his mind and wash his soul like the rain washed the streets. Before entering his house, he blocked out the foreign world, forgetting all other life.

Dry, safe, and far from the streets below, Giovanni returned to the creation of his own world. Bending forward, squinting at the figure in front of him, he stood back, squinting again, then walked away, charcoal clutched tightly in his hand. Naked black lines, fighting to overpower elaborate white highlights, the woman in the chiaroscuro leapt out to him. His hands longed to smudge the woman into life. He worked by reducing his dense, black figures, never once had creating additively interested him.

With lifeless hands covered in powder charcoal, he blackened Gabriela's body, thickening her soul, hardening her neck, turning her into Eve in sink, he turning into the snake, the exiled one, then twisting Gabriela's arms to pluck the apple, with her hands so white, so innocent. Fingers that would have blushed if they touched the peel, blushing with overflowing emotion so that they moistened Giovanni's dry hands with life. Quick as running water, Giovanni destroyed Gabriela's fingers. They could touch no more, and he would not feel her presence enter his soul. His eyes sank into his palms, still damp, heavy with Gabriela's touch lingering on.

Unforgiving black climbed over the setting sun, raising Giovanni's eyes to the window, continuing in their journey across the horizon in the sky, back into his loft, and to the outline of Gabriela's limp, unfinished hands. Each night, loneliness crept into his bed, making him cry out in pain, sharp as an etching needle, spearing and gyrating into his heart, keeping pain in his life by reminding him of his once innocent life.

Behind the windowpane, black with the night, sat the moon, shining light into the loft, where Giovanni could see his charcoal drawings, each white highlight accentuated by the lunar glow, falling, leaping, falling, rendering an account of his life. Figures he created ran his life. The success of a drawing filled with his life and with no one else's made him happy. Gabriela had brought the outer world into his life. Injected into each stroke of charcoal, or each wipe of black, was his life, all his passion. When foreign feelings bit into his heart, Giovanni had to stop and check himself before he went on. He usually smiled when he created a beautiful woman; this time, the woman wanted to create him, and he would not allow it.

Forehead sweating, eyes glazing, and hands trembling, Giovanni reached for a stick of charcoal. Once again he traced Gabriela's hands. Hesitating, he turned and looked back at the moon. The moon's light was fierce, lighting the whole sky, but Giovanni knew that dawn would take it away, that the time would escape, and that Gabriela would be another memory, another unfinished, once-possible masterpiece. To finish the drawing was his goal as he caressed the figure, one that smiled coyly, beckoning with her open palms, yearning to curve her fingers around his hands. Giovanni wanted to feel life once more, he wanted to have someone like Gabriela in his life. Giovanni wanted love, wanted the blackness to pour out of his heart in the rain, but the rain had not cleansed him. His tired hand filled in Gabriela's fingers. With each blackened space, Gabriela seemed to smile more. Having finished the final wiping of charcoal, he smiled, standing behind her. Reaching over, he stretched his hand to her, like a man falling off a cliff, but she returned no hand. He stared wistfully at her smile, he felt her fingers blush, he had given her life, but he remembered that dawn was approaching quickly, maliciously, jealously.

Falling into another space in his heart, Giovanni's smile dissipated from his face. Dark as the rainy night, his soul brooded over what it had felt. He felt that he had lost another chance with love, and life. His mind cleared up before the first streaks of color came into the sky, and as he watched the sun rise against the clear sky, he thought of Gabriela.





charcoal drawing by Stephanie Mudge

## Grown-Up Fibs

by Kate Stephenson

does the stork bundle  
babies and float  
them from the clouds why  
is mommy in the hospital  
i had a nightmare  
i'm only 7

does kissing in a bathing  
suit make babies  
or do i need 2 pails  
filled with sugar and spice  
i don't know i'm  
only 8

Are babies made of watermelon  
seeds swallowed  
by mistake is that why  
people are mostly water  
I want to know I'm only  
ten

Do prayers make babies  
I asked god but nothing  
happened. My sunday  
school teacher lied  
I want to know I'm twelve

I grew up today.  
I know  
the Secret. Why do I  
feel  
so dirty?





photo by Jesse Wennik

## Williamsburg

by Kate Stephenson

melting, twisting  
Magenta to candles. Her moon-colored  
hands dip string into burning  
wax, into colonial blood  
that bubbles and builds  
history on a wick  
layer by layer. Starched  
dress, matching lace  
cap hide  
all womanliness. She pulls  
me into those candlelit  
times. Children's feet  
made tough  
by cobblestone, tobacco  
fields, and barn floors.

Peeling  
my eyes away  
I strain to see — brass  
buckles, pin-striped  
kneecaps—  
lace dresses swallow  
me. The blur deafens

me as I move against  
the kneecaps  
tasting the sweat, drinking  
saw-dust air, searching  
for her familiar  
hand.

Cobblestone rectangles knew  
my leather-encased flesh  
unsteady my ankles. Pin-striped  
kneecaps  
capture me, and coax  
my Laura Ashley flowers after them.  
I hear clumps  
of speech, but can't find  
the words it's all melting  
wax.

My dress and I  
are lifted onto a glass  
counter. Its belly  
exposes silver entrails. And  
pin-striped kneecaps  
beneath the glass top  
arrange  
silver round my neck,  
dangle it from  
my ears, fingers,  
wrists.

## Strategy to Sink or Swim

by Jessica Miner

Trying to keep my head above water  
I grope through dark, numbing ocean swells  
swimming in circle towards a Home  
One in dry, snowy safe highlands  
mother nature replacing my own  
quiet inner tranquility

But I do not know how to build a ship  
or construct a life raft  
I turn away  
dive into a deeper pool  
splashing expectations  
scattered droplets of dreams

Island paternal words from my best friend  
A watery cable from my mother  
I am a tidal wave welling to please  
crashing down onto my soul  
foaming, casting it out to sea  
it bobs, drifting debris  
I fight like a drowning gull to resurface  
and soar above

Like in a game  
my opponent myself  
Anticipation  
I plan each move tactfully  
Frustration  
the burning pressures of love  
I set myself upflooding the board  
too scared of an ending win  
I move to outwit emotion

The game is slowly sinking  
I must choose my means of safety  
too risky to rescue  
the salty water withers my skin  
supports my floating body  
carrying it away in the current



photo by Jason Haas



Juju

by Jessika Miner

Sitting in a dark corner  
speaking to no one, she remembers forgotten years  
Window streaming light  
illuminates through her small, thin, pale body  
Institutionalized, her disinfected home  
smells like old smelling salts of cleanser and medicine  
Under the fluorescent lights and wrinkled faces  
Bobby pins, bathrobes and wheelchairs  
Some mumble, some cry, others have forgotten how  
Down the corridor to the left  
She peacefully waits and remembers

Her old apartment on Kensington Ave.  
three flights up, a musty smell of antique  
lavender and pink  
A rubberband collection tying everything together



the lifesavers and the blue felt tip pens  
her little white gloves worn everywhere  
to the Humane Society and the Garden Club

Family calls  
she still talks about  
the spring visits  
when she would arrive in her big, blue, winged Cadillac  
sewing soft, snuggly, baby blankets  
to be wrapped around all her great grandchildren  
sitting on our back porch in a big, floppy, sun hat  
The time my great grandfather visited from Austria  
their languages so different, yet the same  
she remembers the walks they took me on  
trampling through the leaves  
running after a rambunctious youth  
The summers our family gathered in the Adirondacks  
the weathered cottage  
her grandfather Klimpke built  
nestled between Bigelo and Auger Lake

## The Diner

by Stephen Lee

The diner was almost empty that night when the rain began to fall again. She had felt it long before though; she could somehow sense the thickening weight of the black sky and hear the distant rumblings of thunder, and now she just watched the street through windows now pelted with countless raindrops across a reflection of a much older face. There was still the occasional flash of light, first yellow and then a moment of red, as cars passed quickly by without anything to ever mark their presence. She didn't say anything to the cook taking advantage of the quiet lull to clean up in the kitchen; she just wistfully watched the blurred neon signs and still lit windows as she wiped a dirty yellow rag along the counter without thinking.

Scrubbing the oven clean, making sure that the sides were particularly shiny, the cook had nothing to do but think. The repetition had taken its toll long ago on his imagination and had left him with little but thoughts of her, not that he would ever dare anything. Finished at last, he ran his hands through the running sink water, and splashed some against his face, letting it run down, dripping into the soapy waters and against the dirty plates and eventually onto the tile floor.

While the lightning burned for an instant across the night and her watching eyes, a man walked in against the wind. Shaking his black overcoat free, he sat down in a booth against the window and, slouching, laid his hands down on the table without care. She watched how his head tilted just so to one side and how his eyes fell half-closed as if asleep and how he looked at the empty green seat across from him and she recognized the same look she had seen too often in quick glances over her shoulder into a mirror. The man sat like that for a minute before he sighed, ran his hand through the wet hair, pushing it back, and sat upright in his seat.

His hair was still too wet. A drop of rainwater fell into the coffee cup he now had before him, and the dark brown patterns rippled out to the edges. The casualness of the moment, the circles drawing him both in and out, it all reminded him of what must have been a lifetime ago.

He had been staring into the bathroom mirror when the telephone rang. The hair was getting uncomfortably grayer at the sides, and there were more and



"Sand" photo by Donna Palma Coppola

more lines around the eyes. Reaching out a hand to touch its reflection, he had trembled uncontrollably, and it was only with a hard-won triumph that he could touch the image hidden behind the cool glass. His hard, ragged breaths began to condense on the mirror, blurring his face in a white mist, and then the phone was ringing.

"Hi Daddy! Well, Mommy and me got to the hotel all right. It's so beautiful out here, I wish you could be here with us instead of back home."

"I'm," he stammered, watching the tiled floor. "I'm not your father, little girl."

"Oh. Mom-mee, I think I dialed the wrong number."

"Here, let me take that. Hello? I'm so sorry, sir. Wrong number. You know how children are."

"Yes, yes I do." But even as he began to respond with what was little more than a whisper, he heard the gentle click. He cradled the phone against his face until he heard the silence die and the buzzing begin. Reluctantly, he put down the phone and walked out to his study where he just sat, watching a lonely framed picture and phone keep their secrets. Eventually, he whispered with a cracked voice, "Why?" and without bothering to wait for an answer, without realizing his question hadn't even been asked out loud, he got up and stormed out into the city that welcomed him with opened arms, and eventually to a rain-stricken diner on the corner of two empty streets.

But the diner had not been empty when he came in, only to nurse a single cup of coffee for an hour and then to leave just as sudden with barely a sentence spoken; there were three other customers, a young couple in love with each other and more so with being in love itself, and a man killing time as he watched his broken down car outside and waited for the friend he had just called to take him home.

Sometime that long night, the two lovers would just look at each other and not know what to say, turning away to see their blurred reflections in the rain or to try to find secrets hidden on their plates. It might have happened already, they might not even have realized that moment when it came. As if in a dream, one of them might ask, "I'm not saying anything important, what am I supposed to say," and the other would keep the silence and not ask for more, each quiet and believing that maybe words weren't needed then.

And maybe someday, they would look at each other again and wonder what



those unspoken, undared words ever could have been and how could time have slipped so quickly by and how alien that face was across the table and sharing the same bed. How heavy would it be, the weight of a quiet ring shining gold like the melting sunset in the proper light. Even if they had admitted that they could never know what time would someday bring into their lives, even if they had looked to the future and said that love still had meaning, they would never recognize the changes until that moment when they silently wondered what had happened.

And maybe then, maybe then - or maybe too much time would have to pass again before it ever could happen - one of them would look hard and close into the other's eyes and say without fear or regret, "I don't know what's happened to us. I don't know if we're still really friends." Taking the other's hand, he or she, it could be either, whoever could find the words, would continue. "But I still love you, and maybe we can still try to save each other from the rest of the world." And maybe the other would agree, and maybe they could be that strong, but that was years away, a life time away, and for now, there was soothing laughter and an easy smile and the soft touch of a hand and it felt like it could be enough.

The man sitting at the counter was telling a story to the waitress. Whenever he paused for breath, she would give him a weak smile, and he would go on. Despite the earlier rain, that day so long ago had ended up so beautiful that late summer fading away into autumn. The leaves were still a rich shade of green with only the hint of coming age, and the cool wind was still only the gentle brush of an unseen hand, and his big brother was with him, as they walked down the street to the abandoned, still unsold lot still a way off.

Upon arriving, they spread out to play catch with fallen green crabapples buried under every step. The older brother smiled warmly, took on a face much too solemn for such a day, and yelled out, "All right, little brother, get ready," and hit the baseball straight into the welcoming blue sky. The boy kept his eyes on the ball, careful not to let the sun get in his way, and stepped back just enough, adjusted his stance, and took the ball in, all nice and smooth.

Infectious smiles were replaced with mock seriousness as the day wore on. Eventually, the ball went too high and too far and it crashed through the already cracked window of the overgrown house behind them. They found a bay win-

dow that was mostly broken already and, careful to avoid the jagged edges, they climbed in. The house was in bad condition, but not as bad as the two had believed. The waning sunlight still reached in, tinting everything a fuller shade of red, and there were enough holes to allow the wind to keep the air fresh and the dust in motion. There were countless doors waiting to be opened, endless rooms to be run through, and hidden secrets to be discovered, and of course, they began to explore.

Of all their uncovered treasures that day, the two took only one. They quickly abandoned the dead redbird and the baby doll missing an arm and eye, they left all the dust-drowned books scattered throughout the house, they didn't take any glass bottles for target practice and they didn't even try to take any of the outdated appliances gathering only age and darkness in the cellar. All the older brother wanted to keep was a stopped pocketwatch with fading engravings and with a photograph of a lady yellowing away and all the reason he reluctantly gave was, "I don't know. Maybe, it meant something to someone a long time ago, and now it can be mine. I like it." The brothers walked back in the new fallen night, gossiping and laughing about some now forgotten teacher and some crush best left forgotten.

"He was my only brother, I had two other sisters, and he was the best, but two nights later, he went out on a date with this girl he'd been going out with for just about forever, and they went out to the city, and they took a wrong turn somewhere and," the man let the thought carry him. "And. And." He stared off and then leaning back, slowly finished his cold coffee. "Yeah." She kept that wistful look, sighed for him, and poured fresh coffee into his cup.

Sometime that night, the rain stopped. Hours later, as dawn came again, there would be a light shower, one that would last for only a few minutes before the clouds had nothing more to give. No more tears. The sun would burn away the collected waters, leaving only the rich moistness and juiciness of apples in the waking mouths of the city. But before that, the man waiting for his ride was picked up and taken away. The two that might have been lovers got up and walked together down the street, perhaps to consummate that early morning whatever emotion they did share. And sometime later, the waitress said good night once again to the cook, put on her old overcoat, holding it closely against the wind, and walked the few blocks back to her apartment alone.





photo by Max Ullrich

## Autumn

by Sasha Kipka

I cradled you, as you slept. You gurgled and grinned, stretched your face and struggled into the crook of my arms, as if in the silken folds of a sensational dream. When you awoke you would look up towards my silver mane with those beautiful, black, unseeing eyes, lick your lips, reach for my old man locks. You would feel for my face, with your palms, sketch the lines etched upon my brow with a bemused expression glowing your face as you scratched my woolly eyebrows.

Then I would hug you, tickle you right above the navel in the Tickle Tummy zone, right where you enjoy it, right where you would talk to me in giggles and kick your white stockings in sporadic fits of physical joy. Your merry peals of laughter would feel the air, mirth creating mirth, as leaves fell upon you, rubbing your cheeks.

And I wanted to tell you that this old shaky frame becomes a man again when with you. That life courses through my wooden veins, that Ponce de Leon could have done no better on that warm autumn day. Tell you that you were only as blind as the world could see. But for the moment, I was content to just hold you in my arms, close, have your spirit and your golden locks heat my aging like the sun warms the bare bottom of a boy near the shores of Dublin Lake in the summer of 1907.



photo by Jesse Wennik

Bait

by Sasha Kipka

you aint going to swing  
like a bluebonnet bird in a worm ridden  
shit covered nest  
i ain't gonna let you

you aint going to rot  
like a stale hunk of bread  
that'll live inside you forever  
and fill your purple guts  
with an icy knowledge and a killer wisdom  
that comes with the papers

you aint going to die  
hit six feet deep  
with your bony body  
talk to the mushrooms  
hung out to dry like a dead rat  
maggots bursting that original tomato  
poisoning my love

you aint going to cough  
not once  
not once clear the mucus as if you were yearning  
clawing eyes straining to slide  
through the muscles  
past your thigh  
bend your back  
i aint gonna let you

you aint going to leave me  
alone  
like a daffodil inundated  
a rose scattered desert lot  
pulling at newspaper pages  
i aint gonna let you go  
tease me like a pharisee  
mock what you do not understand  
but never underestimate me

you aint going to rag me  
slap my back when its all a load  
tickle my jaw  
pull on my raggedy ann red yarn hair  
like the strings of a red white sun  
stretching towards a crimson giant

Pinta

by Elizabeth Chen

The sky that day was smoky smothering grey,  
I smelled saltwater moss and stale wood  
I could look at the back of my hand  
and trace the lines  
back to the fossil-tipped beginning.

Alluvial fans and sandstone silt,  
Sun goddesses and silver moons.  
A queen laughing  
and a race dying  
because this is not India.

I wanted to braid my hair with cornsilk  
and drown myself in the sand.  
But I stood in the roots of my people,  
and the white clouds hid everything,  
like the nights that blazed on fire  
and the screams that promised more.





photo by Shanti Roundtree

## Son (Sun) ceasing

by Cami

"There was a little girl with a little curl  
right in the middle of her forehead,  
and when she was good she was very very good  
and when she was bad she was horrid,"

They leave it like that and they don't tell you the rest of the story, because the rest of the story is real. It's not a fairy tale, it's not a nursery rhyme, it's real.

Once upon a time, there was a little girl with a little curl, whom many people thought was very pretty. And this little girl whose thoughts were very good and did not know that she could be horrid.

No, that's not real either.

She wasn't horrid and she wasn't good

She was me.

You see, you'll have to forgive me, because once I thought I was old, when I was young, and didn't know that I didn't have to be either.

Where and when the story started doesn't really matter, it didn't start with me, and I don't know it all. All I know is how it happened to me.

The trolley runs all over Boston. It shows you everything that you can see in the city without getting off. But seeing someone on the T is not the same as seeing them off.

When you see someone on the T, you photograph a moment of yourself. A suspension of time hinging singly on seeing someone sitting on a seat. But that's when you see them on the T, not when you see them off. Or when they see you off.

Moments in time can lead to months of time, which leads to years later when your memories start with a snapshot of a guy sitting on the T. But back to the suspension of time. It doesn't last forever, it lasts as long as you let it.

It seemed a fairy tale, a fantasy, a freak of nature. A paradise lost by our first people regained by us.

Or so it seemed at first. Our first quarrel seemed nothing. The first barbell seemed like a lot. I didn't want to see. You see, he didn't mean for me to hit the



flower print by Anna Kim



barbell. I just did. Most of the times when he threw me he would try to throw me at something soft but my body is not exactly aerodynamic, and sometimes I'd hit the bookcase or the barbells.

The rebellion of knowledge is the exclusion of itself. So when he raped me, I didn't say, I didn't see, I didn't suffer. Until the suspension of time stopped, I didn't talk. The T stops, and time goes on, and our world orbits the son without cease in an effort to recapture its memories.



pencil drawing by Jenny Elkus

## AND IN THE END...

By J. Thibaut

It is my building; the only structure in the city for me...the only one deserving me, and I it. 1720 Annabel Highway fades in the corner of my eye, and manages to obstruct the grandeur of 1729 -- my home, my life, my soul, my kingdom by the sea, my destiny. One lone tree moans next to my monolith, such a true foil. A sniveling sapling contends against a granite and glass monument. A pathetic palm exists next to stone as dark and menacing as coal-black steeds sweating under an orange-flamed sun. How could the palm be caught? Wandering naively among the Narcissi, no doubt.

No time to think, though, my job awaits, the only job I know or shall ever know. An important job, the job I have executed to perfection for the last nine years of my life, years well spent in this place. I take the elevator to the fourteenth floor. I do not know



why there is no thirteenth. In all my journeys in this elevator, I have never though *why* there is no thirteenth; the elevator is a vehicle by which I attend my job...it is nothing more than a link between the bottom and the top. Should I concern myself with what is at the extremes and why? My job is suspended between the two. Nothing matters, my job does not require intricate knowledge of the workings of this elevator. The light glows on fourteen as I race to my job. My job, my job...I can hardly wait. What meaning, what purpose is there for me in standing idle in this elevator when I could be working, just steps away. A bird flies a line in the sky beyond this reality. What job can this one claim?

The door opens and I turn towards my cubicle. I notice a teenage girl sipping coffee and another with her feet up penning a letter. Failures: coffee breaks and letter writing; *they* want to be successful? What meaning does that child have to write about? But back to my cubicle -- enough of the idle. The inventories sit on the desk.

I open my desk. Yes, there are the brand new, unused pencils, though they were sharpened once. I was the one who sharpened them, crafting the ugly stubs into useful points. I shall never use them, they must stay intact, never to be used. Not like the crayons I once had...the orange and black ones split in half, shorter than the others, mocked by the others, laughed at by the others. They were my favorites, but I never used them. Enough of such hauntingly eidetic memories -- I will not forget. Those broken crayons.

Photocopying the inventories is the first order of business. I must walk fifty yard worth to accomplish this. But ten feet away from my desk there is a door. On the other side of that door is a corridor leading to the copier. I have never used that door. I always walk around via the other side of the building. That door scares me, it mocks me, it laughs at me. I run with the inventories. The ozone emitted by the warmed-up copier welcomes me. I know I am home, I belong here. Copy twenty is done. Always twenty copies, for nine years, twenty copies. Back to my cubicle to begin sorting. I ignore the door with the "No Exit" sign on it. It does not frighten me anymore. John, who lives in the cubicle next to me, says hello. I ask him how his knee feels. It looks better from what I can see.

"My knee is fine. Always has been. Get back to your inventories."

Inventories...no, no, come back John. You hurt your knee. I can see it bleeding black and orange, on the door, the door is laughing at you, don't you care? John, pick up my crayons, you've stepped on them, they are short now. No, no inventories. They don't matter, John. can't you see that? Stop drinking the coffee. stop! Stop! STOP!

I tear the inventories with a fury to make the Gods tremble. I shred

them into oblivion. No more inventories. Where are my pencils? Here, here are my crayons. And comforting pencils. Sharp, precise. The bits of the inventories lie strewn on the floor after the massacre. They look like the seeds of the smashed pomegranate, in the acrid pulp of its rind. A rent rind. No. This is my life, the inventories. My mouth hurts. I vomit mustard on the door. It disappears. I must grasp for the original inventories, save them. Run, run, before the door grabs me. There. Twenty, that's the magic number. Twenty. I have twenty warm copies in my hand. It is not clean, pure, purged. My hand is bleeding from where the door pierced me. The copies must remain immaculate. I return to my cubicle. It is the most wonderful feeling. Blood on my pencils. The door smiles.

## Reunion

by Kiki Chiungos

I called  
to tell you that my mom had died  
last night  
just that  
•  
and though I had not talked to you  
for months  
or years (?)  
I did not ask how you had been  
;  
a friend  
does not need introductions.



ink print by Hazel Boyd

Airwalk

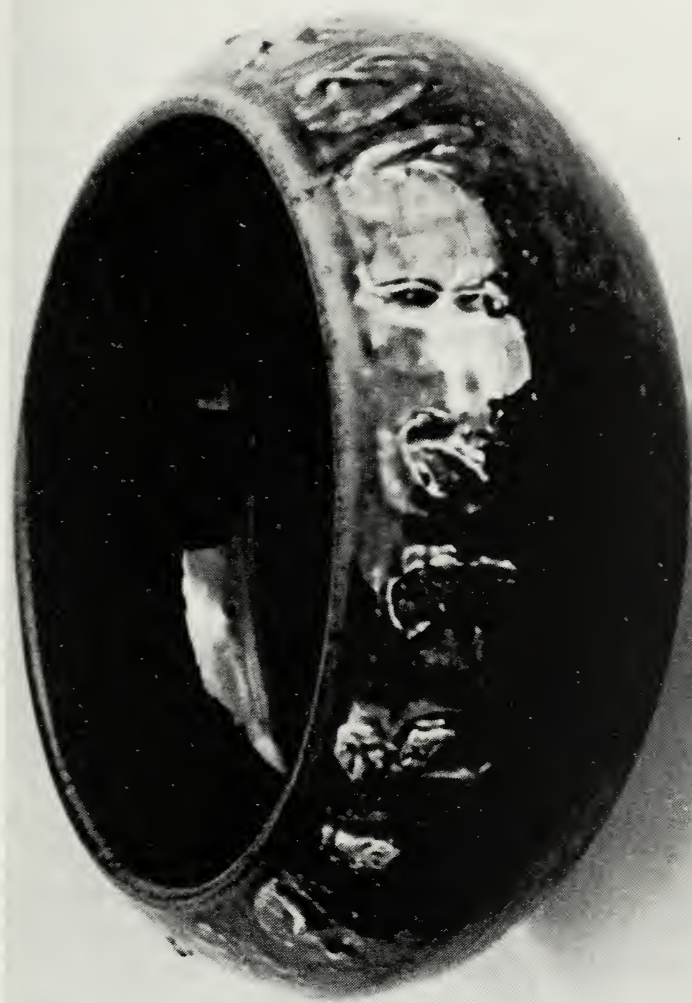
by Kiki Chiungos

"Reflection is for noble minds  
like ours,"  
you hautily expostulate.

"The meaning of the universe  
excites my intellect beyond all else,"  
I ruminate reflectively

as intellectually we step  
cloud-footed in a pile of shit.





ceramic by Max Ullrich

## Dinner

by Michael Blanton

"Interestingly," said Philip, "it is not just the music and art of these people that differs greatly from their neighbors, but it is their whole system of values as well."

As Philip spoke, Samantha fiddled with her peas. She stabbed a plump one with her knife and watched the juice dribble out. Philip continued his monologue while cutting his steak, pausing occasionally to chew or to drink from his screwdriver. Other than Philip's voice, the only sound was of the knives scraping against their plates. Noticing some gravy on Philip's cheek, Samantha handed him a napkin to wipe it with. Philip nodded and cleaned his cheek before resuming his monologue.

"These tribes vary greatly in both their lifestyles and their diets, and the problems between the agricultural tribes and the nomadic people have involved property rights for the most part."

Looking down at the bowl of mashed potatoes on the table, Samantha realized she couldn't eat another bite. "Are you done?" she asked Philip.

"Yes," he said, handing her his plate. "It was very good."

She took his plate and brought it into the kitchen. The refrigerator hummed reassuringly. Noticing a carton of orange juice on the counter, Samantha picked it up and smelt it. It was a little spoiled, but Samantha returned it to the refrigerator anyway. Not having finished his point about the nomads, Philip followed her into the kitchen and spoke again.

"Of course," he began, "their language differences have only complicated their problems."

As she washed his plate, she let the sound of running water drown out his words. She watched the food wash easily off of the plate under the force of the water. The knives and forks clattered as they fell into the sink. She put the plate, cleared of food, on the drying rack, and looked down at her dirty sink. A few peas sat amid the gravy and meat.

"Do you understand now, dear?" Philip asked, pulling the orange juice out of the refrigerator and refilling his screwdriver.

Samantha hesitated for a moment, but then looked back at the residue in her

sink. As the water drained out, it made a slow sucking sound. "No, Philip," she said, "I wasn't listening."

As she walked past him and back into the living room, she noticed his jaw drop slightly. There was a small piece of meat stuck in his teeth. By the time he came walking back through the living room door, she had sat down on the couch and had picked up one of her cookbooks. Standing over her with his hands in his pockets, Philip said, "I happen to find these things very interesting."

"Would you like to have fried chicken tomorrow, or would you like that new curried rice of mine?" Samantha asked, flipping through her cookbook.

"The chicken please. But Samantha, I'm serious. These studies of mine are very important. I don't see why you can't understand that."

"The rice would probably keep better," Samantha said. "We could use it for leftovers next week." It occurred to her that she should have thrown that orange juice away.

Philip stood above her, taking a toothpick out of his pocket and beginning to clean his teeth. The toothpick's tip broke. Soundlessly he walked out of the room and into his study. Hearing that a radio station was playing softly out of the speakers that were attached to his ceiling, he walked over and turned the stereo off. Taking a book from his shelf, he sat down and began to read quietly. While he sat silently in his study, Samantha sat in the living room, reading her cookbook and listening to the faint hum of the refrigerator.

## Once Upon a Wall

by Holly Parker

Once upon  
man was given the wheel  
perfectly round, symmetrical stone  
took man to his horizons.

Once upon man was given light  
pinpointing ray through the dim and dark  
showed him his own ignorance.

Once upon  
man was given fire  
shining, flickering spear  
destroyed man's fear of others.

Once upon  
man developed ambition  
and set out with light, wheel and fire.  
With wheel he conquered distance,  
no longer was he bound to where his feet might carry him.  
With light he conquered night  
and removed the dark blanket which smothered his existence.  
With fire he conquered himself  
the farther he rode and the more he saw  
hatter burned the fire for power.

Once upon  
man came in his travels upon a great wall  
blocking him from eternal power.  
With wheel he traveled night and day  
the wall was endless.  
With light he searched for a crevice  
through which he might glimpse paradise  
the wall was solid.  
With fire he tried to destroy the wall  
so that he might climb through its ashes to glory  
the wall would not burn.  
As the fire roared in defeat, it turned on man  
and he was scorched by the ultimate truth.

Once upon  
man was given gifts  
Once upon  
he used them ambitiously  
And once upon  
man was stopped by a wall called time.

## Joe's Change

by Senia Maymin

"... Going down in a blaze of glory; Lord I never draw first, but I drew first then: I'm the devil's son..." The Bon Jovi lyrics floated out of Joe's window as he drove up to the gas station. Joe walked to the cashier with his stomach out not because he was especially proud of it, but because that was the easiest way to carry himself along. His greasy hair topped off a body so slimy that it seemed to slither out of Joe's jeans and his unbuttoned-to-the-bellybutton blue shirt.

He didn't turn off his engine while filling up the car, and so against federal regulations, Bon Jovi shouted through the car's windows. Joe was not an ordinary Bon Jovi fan, and he hadn't always liked Bon Jovi music. In fact, if you had seen Joe a couple of years ago, you'd never think that he'd have turned out this way. Joe used to be a philosopher, but in the past two years, a lot had changed. Before, he had gone to a good high school, where he had picked up enough knowledge to be able to wrestle with any intellectual for the rest of his life. He was still good at arguing, which he thought all debates basically were.

And he held his stomach out to dare anybody to come up and start arguing; some people hold their chin up and above the world, but Joe relied on his stomach to show how he reacted towards others. Compared to the French love songs and classical ballads that Joe had once listened to regularly, Bon Jovi was simplistic, but Bon Jovi's lyrics were easier to remember, and there was something in the music - some beat that got Joe's stomach to its prime puffed out position.

"Okay, bud, that's \$10.55," said the cashier.

"Okay, I'm gettin' it," replied Joe as he reached inside his pocket. Besides to unbutton his pants before he pissed, the only other time that Joe had to pull his stomach in was to get money.

"Come on, come on. Prometheus didn't have all day to hand the fire out." The cashier was a semi-serious student, working his way through college, and he used this phrase on every customer; it was one of the cashier's ticks. Didn't mean anything; it just came out every so often. He'd found the wrong person to grapple with.



"What do you mean, 'Prometheus didn't have all day?'" He had his whole life pal to screw up, and the one day that he did just happens to be the only day that you know about," threw out Joe to get the cashier to defend himself.

"Yeah, whatever."

"No, whatever," Joe mocked, "I mean, take a look at the guy: what on earth could have possessed him to tempt Zeus' wrath? What the devil was he trying to accomplish? It's like selling coke to teenagers. You don't know what's better: for the kids to get pleasure out of it or for them not to hurt themselves. Prometheus didn't even consider that. Oh, no, he was a hero."

"Hey, if you had knowledge like that, you'd give it out too to further humankind."

"No way, I don't do it. I just don't deal with the coke and the letting out of secrets. After all, who am I - the God Almighty to be lettin' out my knowledge. No, Prometheus got himself into that hubris trap himself. Uh-huh. All his fault."

"Yeah, whatever, pay up, bud."

"What an easy win," Joe thought as he paid the cashier, "And they're not half as interesting as the tough battles."

What had done it? What had made Joe into a commoner-wanna-be who was willing to settle for easy wins? Two years before, the incident was bound to happen; like Prometheus, Joe was bound to screw up one day. For a long time, Joe had been trying the same technique to give himself a terror high. He first thought of it one day when he'd gotten into his car, tired and sleepy. While at the wheel, Joe had just about closed his eyes on a long stretch of road when he popped them open and scolded himself for not being more careful. Later, Joe would purposely get onto a flat stretch of land and close his eyes to play the game; his goal was time; how long could he keep his eyes closed? Highways were the best because people rarely stopped or slowed down, and so the challenge became to close his eyes and stay alive. He succeeded until one day when he heard a scream in front of him as he was on a long flat road. He opened his eyes, swerved to the left, hit a tree, and saved a child on a bike. The damn kid had made Joe open his eyes before he was ready: he had lost that match.

And so Joe turned from pyrrhonism to nihilism forever. He figured, "Why live life in the mean? Why just doubt things when you really don't believe in

them?" Joe had drawn first then, and he didn't need other proof of his deadly powers. He didn't doubt that he could kill himself or someone else after the unsuccessful match. He knew he could. Oh, Joe still closes his eyes on the road sometimes, but he's left morality behind him, and so another match wouldn't bother him. From that point on, neither did anything else; unbothered, Joe became an extremist: grew a stomach, greased his hair, spoke like a commoner, and argued until he won.

The cashier at the gas station had been an easy match, but there were more to meet.



oil painting by Ascha Drake

For the N.E.A.

by Kinn-Ming Chan

Rabbit shit soft bullets  
Odorless and round with the frequency of sensational headlines.  
Helms tells his rabbit friends to fear  
only the steeltipped bullets  
the ones which release aromas more pungent  
than Christ's doomed sweat.  
Pure water from an animal designed to die  
and determined to insure life.  
They say it really reeked.  
Stench so bad that Helms didn't just hold his breath  
he exhaled,  
so full of fright that he  
huffed and he puffed...  
but all we know about the house  
was his desire to terminate  
it.  
He never noticed the soft odorless bullets.



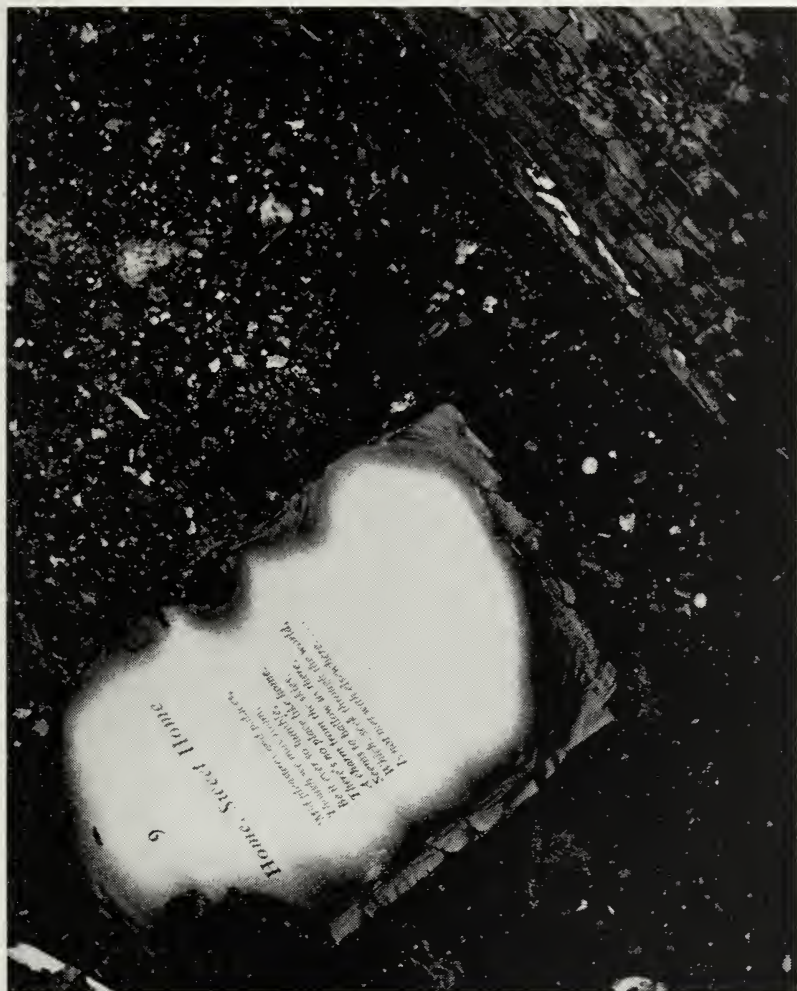


photo by Mike Pieretti

## White Flowers

by Kinn-Ming Chan

My bones were crushed in a homeland I never knew,  
where my father weeps as patiently  
as the blood sucking mosquitoes feed.

Napalm flames howling through the streets  
frighten the babies who bawl  
as their skin peels back from their tender bodies like  
the dried petals falling  
from my father's white flower.

His back  
is bent  
like the wet hay he stacked  
and he  
rocks on  
his heels  
squatting  
(like the family pigs)  
in the ancestral temple.

wet. slick. mud. packed hard like Po-po's bread  
before it bakes.  
His heels smite the mud.

slippery. petroleum. rain on the open-to-the-sky temple  
smolders incense sticks that wilt in their own ash.  
Ba-ba's white flower wilts too.  
The petals are battered  
by rain, and they drop  
towards the mud.



The slates my ancestors had left  
(their legacy and will carved in by hands long ago)  
echo the blank pregnant clouds.

I never saw a xenophobe.  
I used to feed our pink and brown pigs.  
I never saw a red pig before, but  
Ba-ba curses them now,  
in the rain, with his wilted flower,  
in our smashed up ancestral temple,  
left with the mud  
and the sky  
and the grey  
    slate  
    walls.



photo by Jason Haas



